



D1 The Society of Medicolegal Death Investigators (SOMDI)

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The goal of this presentation is to review the history of the medicolegal death investigator profession, to introduce medicolegal death investigators and forensic scientists to the Society of Medicolegal Death Investigators (SOMDI), and to explain why SOMDI has been formed, its goals and objectives.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by discussing why/how the Society of Medicolegal Death Investigators was created to provide medicolegal death investigators with a professional membership organization to assist in their training, education and professional development.

Medicolegal death investigators are lay individuals employed by medical examiner, coroner offices, and private organizations to investigate violent, suspicious, and sudden unexpected deaths. There are more than 3,100 counties within the United States; each jurisdiction requiring some type of death investigation system. It is a conservative estimate that there are more than 8,000 people currently serving as death investigators in these medicolegal jurisdictions.

Medical examiner and coroner offices in the United States first began employing lay medicolegal death investigators (MLDI) in the late 1960s. This occurred as medical examiner and coroner offices recognized the need for independent death investigations to be conducted by their staffs. These investigators are responsible for representing the medical examiner or coroner at the death scene. They take charge of the decedent's body and actualize the subject at the scene of death. They develop pertinent scene-related information. They are responsible for ensuring that the subject is conveyed from the scene to the forensic office for examination and that a balanced death investigation is performed with local law enforcement authorities.

Investigators develop the decedent's demographic information and medical/social/occupational/criminal history. They establish the person's identity. They then are responsible for locating and notifying the decedent's next of kin. This need is magnified because few forensic pathologists conduct scene investigations due to time constraints.

After several years of effort by veteran medicolegal death investigators working on a Technical Working Group for Death Investigation; the National Institutes of Justice published the *National Guidelines for Death Investigation* in December 1997. Adopting those guidelines, the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI) was created in 1998 and began operation at Saint Louis University School of Medicine in St. Louis, Missouri. In 2005, the ABMDI was accredited by the Forensic Specialties Accreditation Board. Two levels of ABMDI certification now exist – the basic level (Registry) and advanced level (Board). Currently there are more than 1,000 ABMDI Registered and 150 Board certified medicolegal death investigators worldwide.

In February 2009, the National Academy of Sciences released their report, *Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States: A Path Forward*. The report emphasized the future needs for forensic practitioners: mandatory professional certification, development of practice standards and adequate training and continuing education opportunities.

In response to that report, a new professional organization, the Society Of Medicolegal Death Investigators (SOMDI), has been created specifically for the medicolegal death investigator forensic practitioner. SOMDI is expected to begin operations in early 2010. Its purpose is to promote medicolegal death investigators training, education, and encourage to ABMDI certification for its membership. SOMDI is expected to provide medicolegal death investigators with an association dedicated to their specific needs and encourage professional development and networking opportunities. SOMDI is expected to provide the membership a forum for exchange of information, ideas, and experiences. Standards for medicolegal death investigators will be discussed, formulated, and scrutinized for future adoption by the membership. A list serve and website will be developed to support membership-wide communications. In the future, SOMDI will conduct membership meetings in conjunction with other forensic organizations to foster collaborative projects.

This presentation will provide attendees updated information as to SOMDI's goals and objectives, membership criteria, and organizational applications.

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